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WILL WOMEN RETIRE FROM INDUSTRY WITH RETURN OF PEACE?

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THE subject that I am asked to speak on this afternoon is whether women ought to or will leave industry at the termination of the war. I think it will be well for us to have in mind what women did before the war. In 1910 we had eight million women in this country in gainful occupations. That means, of course, that women always worked. We have worked in the home; and when the work was taken from the home into the factory, we followed the work into the factory. The new conditions during the war are not that women have entered industry but that they have entered in larger measure into industries affected by the war. When we think along these lines, of course we think of the munition factories, and machine industries. I believe it was in 1912, before the war, at least, that I had occasion to organize about two hundred machine workers in the city of Chicago. They were already in the machine trades at that time, and since that they have gone into them in increasing numbers. They cannot leave industry as they have to work to live. When we think of women going into industry we probably are thinking about many women who were not in industry before. The very meagre figures available show that such women form only five per cent of the women in industry, and they most likely are going back home or wherever they may have come from, but for the other women it will be largely a question of shifting from one industry to another. The women who went into the war industries were principally women from other industries. A large number of them were garment workers, others were house workers, waitresses, and so on, and with the termination of the war industries those women will probably go back into their former occupations.

The great danger, it seems to me, in the whole situation is

the question of wages—equal pay for equal work. We find short-sighted men, working men, saying that a woman ought not to have the same wages as a man. We find that the employers generally think that women should not have the same wages that men have. I remember very well during the war, I went to a manufacturer who asked for women to work at night. It was in a state where there is a law prohibiting women working between the hours of ten in the evening and six in the morning. He wanted to put on three shifts, and when I got to the factory, this is what he said. "I have a shift of men at night; but they are no good, they can't do the work, and if I have to keep them and can't employ women I am only manufacturing for the scrap pile. The women are the best ever. They are doing fine work, they are doing more work than the men, and they are doing it better, and there is very little scrap along with their work." I said, "What are you paying the men who work at night?" He said he was giving them 40 cents an hour with a 15 per cent bonus for working at night. I said, "What are you going to pay the women for working at night?" And he said, "Well, we will start them in at 25 cents an hour." That was the answer to me, and I think it is the answer to every one. I said to him, "Don't you think that is unfair? You say that the women are the best ever, you say that they do better work, they do more work, and they come here with greater regularity than the men, but you don't intend to pay them the same wages that you pay the men." He said, "Well, you know, they have not the same family responsibilities that the men have." I said, "Do you know what family responsibilities the men have that are employed by you now?" He said, "Well, I don't know, but I suppose some of them have families to support and some have not." I said, "Do you know what family responsibilities the women have?" He said, "No, I don't know very much about them, either, but I do know that we have some widows working in the factory, with children to support." I said, "I believe that if you could go to every one of them and count them up, you would find that the women probably have as large family responsibilities as the men." He said, "Well, of course we haven't looked at it that way, and anyway, in this town we are not

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paying women the same money." The keynote is equal pay for equal work. And, that does not mean a question of sex. It should be a question of the job, the rate should be fixed for the job, and not for the woman or the man.

It seems to me that if we are going to withdraw from the industries we ought to withdraw the children who are now employed and are below the age of sixteen. About one million are in the industries to-day. Take the South—we have seen something of the South since this war began—I have not been down there, but I have read numerous cases laid before the War Labor Board, and it is deplorable. We find that eight per cent of the people are illiterate, we find they have very few schools, the children go into the factories and mills to work at the age of eight and nine, and even younger, and what kind of a citizenship are we going to get from that? It is time that we withdraw the children from industry. There is a tendency to open up the labor market by discharging a lot of people and flooding the labor market by unemployment. I was told in Boston by the manager of an employment service, that jobs are offered to the women for three, four and five dollars a week less than they have been getting. The women are refusing to take them.

These are very serious questions, and I am glad that the Government railroad administration has stood so firmly for equal pay for equal work. There were cases where they did not get it, but when called to the attention of the Railroad Administration readjustment was made.

All along the line there will not be uniform equal pay for equal work unless the women organize into the trade union movement—the women's movement. Many people say that women do not organize as readily as the men. I always feel like differing with people who say that. I believe that if you take the proportion of women in industry who are organized, and the same proportion of men in industry organized, you will find that women as a whole are as well organized as men. If you divide them into industries you may find that men are better organized. There has been opposition by men's organizations because they did not want the women in their industries, as demonstrated recently in Cleveland, and some of us are very heartily ashamed of it. The people of this country, particu-

larly the working women and working men, must take this question of equal pay, equality in pay and equality in jobs, seriously. We need to think about it and to study it. We must secure the general acceptance of this just principle and put it into force by backing the government in every possible way—for it is trying to do its share to shape and regulate industry in the period of reconstruction—so as to achieve full justice for the women in industry who have done so much to help win the war.

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